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(8)
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PLAIN

Control 8763

Rec'd March 18, 1950
12:52 p.m.

FROM: Brussels

TO: Secretary of State

NO: 444, March 18

Following communique issued by government after Cabinet meeting this forenoon:

"The Government not having been able to agree on convocation of Chambers (of Parliament), and this point not having been included in Governmental agreement (of last August), Prime Minister has decided to present resignation of Government to Prince Regent."

MURPHY

MAH:EJC

755.00/3-1850

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

REVIEWED BY J.L. Smith DATE NOV 1 7 1982

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MAR 23 1950

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(9) (OVER)

FOREIGN SERVICE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

SECURITY : RESTRICTED PRIORITY: AIR POUCH

TO : Department of State March 18, 1950 755.00/3-1750

FROM : THE HAGUE 470 XR 755.11

REF :

SUBJECT : COMMENT ON BELGIAN REFERENDUM RE LEOPOLD

EUR INDEX

23
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RECD MAR 20
ACTION EUR
INFO DCR OLI IE

The Dutch have taken a keen interest in the referendum conducted in Belgium to gauge popular sentiment concerning the proposal that ex-King Leopold resume the throne.

Pre-referendum comment centered primarily on the possible effects of the campaign on the career of Mr. Spaak. Excluding Socialist newspapers, which did not comment on this point, the Dutch press appeared to be generally agreed that, whatever the results of the referendum, Spaak would be the loser. The Catholic press was especially outspoken in expressing its belief that Spaak's uncompromising opposition to Leopold's return has severely damaged his political career. DE VOLKSKRANT, describing Spaak as "until recently, the greatest statesman of Western Europe", says that Spaak is now "finished as a European". "Only a caricature remains", it continues, "of a man who was once the hope of Western Europe; he has wasted his reputation in an ignoble cause". (Comment: Similar views were expressed privately by certain officials of the Foreign Ministry.)

As expected, the Dutch Socialist press sympathized with the position of the Belgian Socialists, and editorialized against Leopold's return. HET PARCOL predicted that an attempt by Leopold to resume the throne would mean "unrest, lawlessness and possible rebellion".

After announcement of the results of the referendum, most Dutch newspapers took the view that Leopold had won a phyric victory at best. Socialist HET VRIJE VOLK declared joyfully: "Leopold is a lost man. Should he be stiff-necked enough to attempt to return now, it would be tantamount to a coup d'etat." Independent HET PAROOL drew the same conclusion, asserting that "peace and order can never be furthered by the return of a King whom more than 42 percent of his people have shown they don't want". The liberal and Protestant press took a less extreme position, but agreed that the results cannot be regarded as satisfactory, either to Leopold or to Belgium. Even the Catholic press found little comfort in Leopold's majority. DE MAASBODE, for example, could only hope that members of the Belgian Parliament will be fully aware of their terrible responsibility, and that four years of agitation will soon end. DE TIJD was the only Catholic paper to take an aggressive line; it asserted that Leopold now

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has a perfect right to resume his throne. "If the opposition of the King", explained DE TIJD, "consider that 57.69 percent of the population have no right to impose their will on the whole people, it is still less to be seen why 42.32 percent of the same people should impose their will on the remainder".

Communist DE WAARHEID, of course, opposed Leopold vehemently, calling him "the pawn of the Americans". The paper stated that the referendum campaign has revealed to the Socialists how necessary it is that there be unity of action among the workers, and expressed the hope that this unity would continue. (COMMENT: This is the first recent appeal for Socialist-Communist unity to be forthcoming from the Dutch Communist press). Finally, in commenting on the referendum results, DE WAARHEID declared that the Belgian referendum illustrated the cracks and clefts in capitalism, and then contrasted Belgian predicament with the results of the recent Soviet elections, which "displayed a picture of remarkable moral and political unity".

For the Ambassador:
William T. Nunley

William T. Nunley
Attaché

Copy to Brussels.